

When you have completed this exercise, look back over your list again. When you come to a skill that you enjoy using, circle the number that corresponds with that skill. Then create a page in your binder with a listing of the circled 4s and 5s. These should be the skills you focus on. To add validity to this new abridged list, ask a friend whose opinion you really value to assess the list objectively. A former teacher may fill this role as well. See if there are any discrepancies between your self-perception and the perception of others. Keep in mind that if there is a conflict, it may be because your friend has never had the opportunity to see you using a particular skill.

When you have completed this list, and when you have asked for objective feedback, move on to the next section in this chapter, “Know Your Weaknesses.”

Know Your Weaknesses

Coming to a better understanding of your skills is of extreme importance, because it is the foundation upon which you will build your job-search plan. It is also important to take an objective look at your weaknesses. The list in Table 1.1 will give you a look at some of your areas of weakness. Scores of 1 or 2 are indicators of possible areas of weakness. Your weaknesses may or may not relate to your disability. Regardless of the source or cause of the weakness, it’s helpful to determine which weaknesses may be a factor in your job search. If a weakness stands in the way of your goal, you may want to address it.

Remediating a weakness may be as simple as practicing a skill you rarely use, or as involved as taking classes at a local university or adult education program. By addressing the weakness before you begin your job search, you show the prospective employer that you have a good self-understanding, and that you are being proactive about self-improvement.

In your binder, draw up a list of your weaknesses and ask someone, perhaps the same person who helped give you feedback on your skills and traits (that is, if you are still speaking!), to look over your list with you. Again, an objective look may be helpful. Sometimes we are our own toughest critics. What you may list as a weakness because you know you can do much better, someone else may see as an average ability. When you have completed this exercise, move on to the next section, which examines disability assessment issues.

Assess the Issues Relating to Your Disability

In addition to your weaknesses, you should also address issues relating to your disability. You need to examine your disability and the way in which it may manifest itself in your job search. You may find that the disability has no impact at all on your choice of career. In fact, many people with disabilities have been employed for years, and their supervisors and coworkers have absolutely no idea at all that they have a disability. In other cases, a disability will require some accommodations. (For a more in-depth discussion about workplace accommodations, see Chapter 13.) For example, a person with diabetes may need to follow a more rigid eating schedule to facilitate the maintenance of their blood sugar levels. In other cases, a disability may require some direct modifications to the workplace (such as the width of doorways or the height of a drafting table) or the way that tasks are accomplished (such as voice-recognition software to aid data entry and word processing).

By considering the ways in which your disability may affect your work, you can anticipate potential questions in a job interview. This will give you the opportunity to fashion your responses in a way that will impress the employer with your preparation and your self-understanding. It may also help to put the employer at ease with the thought of hiring a person with a disability.

The following is a list of disabilities or disability-related circumstances and potential ways they can impact your work or your employer. Keep in mind that whether they actually do affect your work is beside the point. In addition to the challenge of overcoming ways in which your disability does impact your life, you must also deal with the misperceptions of how it might affect your life.

- **AIDS/HIV**

- Regular medication regimen

- Contiguosness/risk to coworkers

- Potential for extended sick leaves

- **Using assistive devices (braces, cane, wheelchair)**

- Stationary—can't get around to do what needs to be done

- Exorbitant workplace modification costs

- Slowness